



**Testimony of Dr. Weymouth Spence
President of Washington Adventist University
Testimony on the Planning Board Draft
Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment**

January 25, 2024

Council President Friedson and members of the County Council. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Planning Board Draft of the Takoma Park Minor Master Plan Amendment. My name is Dr. Weymouth Spence and I am the President of Washington Adventist University – an approximately 24.8-acre university campus located in one of the potential growth areas of the Plan.

The University is bounded by Maple Avenue, Flower Avenue, Carroll Avenue, and the former Washington Adventist Hospital site. We have been in Takoma Park since 1904 and I have been president since 2008. The University is owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and offers a quality education to students of different faiths from around the world. There are currently a little under 600 students enrolled in our undergraduate and graduate programs and we are poised to grow even larger. I am pleased that the Planning Board Draft of the Minor Master Plan Amendment provides a number of tools and opportunities to do so.

Together with Adventist HealthCare, which controls the 17.4-acre former Washington Adventist Hospital campus to the west of the University, we have envisioned how our combined portion of the Minor Master Plan area could grow to address current and future University needs. We also understood that the combined campus could help address area wide housing, recreation and connectivity opportunities if the Plan were done correctly.



On that note, I am pleased that the Planning Board Draft has recognized the need to rezone our properties to a more flexible zone that also respects the built environment outside of the campus. Under its current zoning, the University must comply with the applicable residential development standards that are incompatible with modern universities. These constraints have stifled our growth and put us at a competitive disadvantage in comparison to other similarly sized universities. The CR zoning recommended in the Planning Board Draft provides the critical flexibility for the University to grow as needs and funding will allow.

While we are generally pleased with the other recommendations in the Minor Master Plan, there are a few noteworthy exceptions. Primarily, we are concerned with specific recommendations that, years from now, may be interpreted too literally so as to make potential redevelopment opportunities too expensive or infeasible. These matters include recommendations for our iconic open space along Flower Avenue; the “Green Promenade” recommended along Maplewood Avenue and into the campus; and planned gateways bordering our campus. Furthermore, our central common space provides identity for the university and revered by our students, alumni and staff. We find it unprecedented for a private, religious affiliated university to allow their most sacred open space to be considered public open space. We address these items in technical corrections we propose in an attachment submitted with this testimony.

We look forward to staying engaged as the Minor Master Plan moves forward to final approval and look forward to working with you to ensure that the Plan may accommodate the positive changes that are envisioned for Takoma Park and our campus.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

WASHINGTON ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY
CHANGES TO THE PLANNING BOARD DRAFT
January 25, 2024

Planning Board Recommendation	Proposed Change(s)
<p>Property recommendation at p. 101</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o include a primary central <u>public</u> open space of approximately 1/2-acre. o include a primary central <u>public</u> open space of at least ½ -acre and that is open to Flower Avenue and provides benefits to existing and future residents. Design flexibility should be considered at the time of development review, retaining the central commons as an organizing feature of future development. (Emphasis added) 	<p>Replace “public” with “private”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The term “public” assumes the community has the right to openly utilize the Commons. •The Commons is a special open space for the University students, alumni and staff. The space has meaningful trees, plaques, objects and other donated furnishings that need to be protected. •Certain activates and actions from the general public may be inconsistent with the values and mission of the University.
<p>Carroll Avenue Right-of-way dedication recommendation at p. 102</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o as discussed in 3.2.4, dedicate right -of-way on the north side of Carroll Avenue along a portion of the site frontage as needed to accommodate an SHA project to realign Carroll Avenue, up to a maximum of 50 feet. 	<p>Revise bullet as follows:</p> <p>Add “as discussed in 3.2.4, <u>provide a variable width right-of-way up to 50 feet</u> on the north side of Carroll Avenue along a portion of the site frontage as needed to accommodate an SHA project to realign Carroll Avenue.”</p> <p>[also Revise the second bullet on p. 50 with similar language]</p>
<p>Parks and Open Space Green Promenade recommendation at p. 50</p> <p>Implement the Green Promenade, as described in Section 3.3.1. In the Flower Avenue District, this also includes improving the bicycle and pedestrian connection between the Sligo Creek trail and the Long Branch trail, through the establishment of a sidepath that extends along the</p>	<p>Add the following language:</p> <p>“The Planning Staff should work with the City and the two-dozen or so property owners to agree on an acceptable typical section or sections, depending on site conditions, with limited to no impact to the environment.”</p> <p>Delete the precedent image on p. 41 or find another image more relevant to the site conditions.</p>



WASHINGTON

ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY

Gateway to Service

1904-2024

<p>east side of Maple Avenue and the south side Maplewood Avenue between Sligo Creek Parkway and Flower Avenue and a new trail, connection from Maplewood Avenue (west of Flower Avenue) to Maplewood Avenue (east of Greenwood Avenue) to connect the Sligo Creek trail to the Long Branch trail).</p>	<p>[also referenced in The Green Promenade (3.2.1 at p. 40-44 and in A “Kit of Parts” (3.2.1.1 at p. 41) Plan)</p>
<p>Parks and Open Space Carroll/Flower Avenue Gateways recommendation at p. 105</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement the Carroll Avenue Gateway concept described in Section 3.3.1 through building and site design and materials that reflect the history and character of the Adventist Campus.• Implement the Flower Avenue Gateway concept described in Section 3.3.1 through building and site design that emphasize the connection between the Adventist Campus and the Erie Center.	<p>Add language to the first bullet as follows:</p> <p>“These gateways should not detract or cause confusion from identifying the Washington Adventist University.”</p> <p>Add language to the third bullet (Carroll/Flower Avenue) on page 33:</p> <p>“These gateways should not detract or cause confusion from identifying the Washington Adventist University.”</p> <p>Relocate the Gateway at Flower and Maplewood to Flower and Erie to avoid conflict with Wayfinding / Identification of the Washington Adventist University at the campus edge.</p> <p>[also referenced in Gateways (3.2.1.1 at p. 40)]</p>